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ABSTRACT

This book aims to provide a better understanding of Mexican American high school students and their struggles with ethnicity, Americanization, prejudice, schools, and life's purposes. In most Anglo minds, these students are characterized by exceptionally high dropout rates and poor school performance, without any explanation for this performance other than their Mexican origin. This book explores the real-life situations of young people of Mexican descent in a suburban and an urban high school in 1974 and again in 1988. "Thumbnail" sketches of students demonstrate that there is much more diversity among Mexican Americans than is commonly thought. The students for each time period are categorized culturally as Mexican-oriented, intermediate, and Anglo-oriented, but personal adaptation varies both between and within categories. The profiles examine students' family background; parent aspirations and influence on student achievement and behavior; lifestyles; student aspirations and attitudes toward education, language, and culture; gang involvement; and school and community environments. The final chapters discuss how the new wave of Mexican immigration has strengthened bilingual education and students' ethnic pride and identity in both urban and suburban areas; summarize the multiple and shifting identities of "personas mexicanas"; and review the complex set of structural, cultural, social, and personal factors that influence educational performance. An appendix describes quantitative and qualitative methodology. The book contains over 200 references, an index, and photographs. (SV)

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